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FRENCH INSTRUCTION IN CALIFORNIA—ITS AIMS AND METHODS.

THERE are probably only three cities in the United States whose French residents are sufficiently numerous or sufficiently well organized to be said to form a colony; these are New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco. The French residents of these cities have their clubs, churches, societies, libraries, newspapers, and representative men. The presence of such a colony in San Francisco has had its influence on French education in California, as most of the private teachers are native French men or women, and in the early history of the instruction most of the teaching in the schools was done by them. But the influence of organizations and publications in which French is the medium of communication is far less than it ought to be, and would be, if it were possible to bring about closer relations between the colony and the teachers of the state.

French began its public career in the seminaries and boarding schools gathered about the bay of San Francisco, where it was taught chiefly as an accomplishment, but it was not taught for its educational value till its study was advocated by the university. The University of California was founded in 1868, when modern-language instruction was as yet undeveloped; and French did not become a matriculation subject till many years later. The *Register* contented itself simply with repeating monotonously that "one year of Latin will help in the acquisition of the modern languages," that "early training in the pronunciation of the spoken language is strongly urged," and that "one year's instruction in grammar and pronunciation is desirable."

In 1880 the "accrediting" system was established under which members of the university faculty might be appointed to visit a secondary school, and if the school met the approval of these "visitors," its graduates could be "recommended" by the principal to enter the university without examination. At first the school was "accredited" or "rejected" as a whole; later, by

subjects. For this latter purpose a list of fourteen subjects was drawn up, but modern languages was not one of these. "A good reading knowledge of French or German" was constantly recommended in the *Register*; a student had the privilege of passing an examination, but his only reward was the permission to omit the elementary course in the Department of Modern Languages. During all this time the department itself was saying in its announcement that "the first two years will be devoted mainly to translation of French into English."

In 1891 Subject 15 was added to the list. This meant two years of French in a high school, and required "a knowledge of elementary grammar, ability to translate ordinary French at sight and to translate simple English into French." In 1897 there was considerable expansion in the university department, though the first two years were still devoted to translation. At the same time began a persistent effort to raise the standard of French instruction in the high schools.

The first complete "visitation" of the schools for French was made in 1900, and in 1901 a set of requirements was drawn up by the university on the report of the Committee of Twelve as a basis, under which an applicant from the schools might offer from two to four years of French. By this action French was put on the same basis as Latin. At the same time the department revised its own ideals and methods, especially in its attitude toward translation.

In 1894, 3 out of 57 schools were accredited in French; in 1896, 18 out of 76; in 1900, 34 out of 116; in 1901, 37 out of 118, 12 of these being accredited for the three-year course. This year (1904), 55 schools are on the list of applications for accrediting in French. This increase seems not to be at the expense of Latin or of German, and Spanish has more than doubled during the past few years.

What has stood in the way of progress in modern-language instruction in this state has been, first, its non-recognition by the university, and, second, the lack of prepared teachers. At first these teachers were mostly foreigners who taught by the "natural method" without system; later, as the university gained

influence in the state, these were supplanted by college graduates, who had learned to "translate" French, but who could not speak it. French was taught as a dead language, with a few brilliant exceptions in the large cities, where the teachers were members of the French colony who had received a university education. This insufficiency in the instruction became evident to the university "visitors," who realized at once that there must be better teachers, and that the university must prepare them. It is now engaged in this attempt, and is trying to send out men and women who can teach the French as a living language. Until the universities of the country undertake this task, we cannot hope for much progress in the teaching of the modern languages, for there is at present no place where young men and women can go for this preparation.

The insufficiency of the instruction has been owing in a great measure to the false method that has been in use. The main value of the study of a foreign language comes from the introduction of the learner to a new people; and since he usually cannot visit the foreign country, he must know this people from its literature. The main object, then, is to read the literature intelligently. The secondary object is to use the language in a commercial or social way. Of course, the thorough accomplishment of the chief aim would include the other, and any serious attempt to "read the literature intelligently" must carry with it greater or less proficiency in the spoken tongue.

In the matter of accomplishing these objects, California has had the experience of the rest of the Union. Happily there has been not much Grammar Method; not much Natural Method, except in private instruction, where it belongs. It is the so-called Reading Method that has been most in use and is the hardest to kill or to change into anything vital. It is recognized as a legitimate method, even by the Committee of Twelve. Since it consists generally of translating French into English it is really not reading at all, but a Translation Method. This is the method that is probably most in vogue in the United States, as it is the only one which graduates of colleges, as a rule, can use. Besides, those under the sway of classic traditions in

language teaching, those who are insufficiently prepared, and those who think that in two years it is not worth while to try anything else, all fall readily into this.

A true method must teach the student: (*a*) to understand a French text without being first obliged to translate it; (*b*) to express thought in French without first formulating it in English. The end of the instruction is rather not to translate, and it is evidently illogical to hope to attain this end by persistent translation. The student in reading French under this scheme makes a rapid transliterating into a hybrid tongue, which is neither French nor English, and thinking in this day after day cannot but be educationally demoralizing. Education consists in forming correct habits, and the fundamental error of the Translation Method lies in the fact that it frankly and deliberately confirms the learner in the very habit that he is trying to break up. It must, therefore, be educationally unsound. The Committee of Twelve recommends that the deadness of this method be relieved by some oral work and some exercises in composition, but these exercises, being of such a nature as to confirm the student in the translation attitude of mind are, therefore, futile.

A true method must take into account and make use of the strong associations which exist between an object and its English name. The English word is for the learner the best definition of the French word—better even than the object itself, as the group of associations which cluster about the English word he may transfer at once to the French word. For instance, *arbre* is a general term of which no single tree, like an oak, gives a complete idea, whereas “tree,” gives the conception at once. This evidently may be a great help in learning a language, if the learner will at once transfer to *arbre* the associations connected with “tree,” and the main efforts of a sound method must be bent toward making sure the transferring of these associations. The Translation Method fails in this, since the learner is not taught to make this transfer; he sees or hears the word *arbre*, which suggests “tree,” and it is the English word that carries the associations.

I know of a number of students who had learned to read French fairly in a well-taught secondary school. In college they were put into a class where they translated persistently for a year, after which they entered a class in literature where it was necessary to read voluminously. These students had lost their power of reading French, and lamented constantly the fact that they had acquired a habit of mind that was not only useless, but destructive of their appreciation of the foreign language.

One is struck by the attitude of language teachers generally toward translation. In a collection of essays by various professors of modern languages, published in 1896, translation is taken for granted by most of the writers. Some of them advocate it openly. One says that the object of the study of French is "to translate the literature;" another speaks of the "rapid, clear-cut work which translation in the modern languages is so well adapted to give." Nearly all of them advocate "translation at sight." "Reading must begin by translation," and "the thoughtful translation of literary masterpieces cannot fail to refine the taste." "Translation should not be literal." Even an advocate of the Natural Method says that "translation should be postponed as long as possible." "It is wise to translate consciously and in *words* as we read. There is no better aid in mastering our vernacular." "Translation at hearing should be practiced constantly in the study of language."

There is no doubt but that the instruction in modern languages in the United States is based on the Translation Method. It has become so much a tradition that it is taken for granted in all our texts and books of instruction. As translation is substituted for reading, so is composition for the writing of French; and what is composition but translation reversed? It is against this habit that I am protesting here. I want to throw this whole matter into such doubt that text-book writers shall be obliged to take a conscious stand, and if they use the words "translation" and "composition," they shall be obliged to explain and defend them.

In the usual study of a dead language like the Latin, the grammar is learned theoretically, and then by means of a dic-

tionary the text is translated into English. Pronunciation is not important; neither is a ready vocabulary imperative. The whole procedure is reflective and consists all the way through of a comparison of the Latin with the English. Of course, French may be studied in this way, but it is to make it a dead language.

A different procedure is necessary in the living languages. An exact pronunciation and a ready vocabulary are very important; the grammar must be practical, even instinctive. A slavish habit of using grammar and dictionary is destructive of progress in the modern tongues. The procedure here is not comparative, but direct. The learner should be taught persistently to make an effort to get the thought directly from the spoken or printed sentence without the intervention of the English.

The pronunciation is the foundation of a living language. We have been teaching this by mere imitation, but the time has come for a more scientific training of ear and tongue. Whether we use the apparatus of the Phonetic Method or not, it is certain that we cannot longer ignore this fundamental part of the instruction. There is no doubt but that the instruction should begin with a study of the sounds of the language, and for this purpose a small, well-chosen list of names of common objects is the best. After a sound is thoroughly mastered, that is, can be recognized and produced, its association with its written symbol is not a difficult matter. The very prevalent method of teaching pronunciation by pronouncing a text before it is understood sins by beginning with the symbols instead of the sounds. It is generally coupled with the Translation Method, and will disappear at the same time.

The understanding of a French text and its translation are two different things. The procedure by which a student "pronounces" a text and then "translates" it is vicious in two respects: it makes the learner self-satisfied in an easy knowledge which is not genuine, and it confirms him in an attitude of mind which renders him incapable of appreciating French literature. A better way to proceed on the part of the teacher is to have the learner answer questions about the text, explain it, give a summary of it—all in French; and then read it with

proper phrasing and expression. If the teacher will resolve to get at the student's understanding of a text without having him translate it, he will not only give him an appreciation of the text itself, but a great deal of useful practice in handling the language. What is usually practiced in schools under the name of translation is putting set English expressions in place of set French ones. Translation itself is not a method at all, but a difficult art which is possible only to those who have a ready command of both languages.

"Composition" is the reverse of "translation," that is, putting set French expressions in place of set English ones. Composition in English means writing English, but the word in foreign-language nomenclature refers to this transliteration, which is not writing at all. These words "translation" and "composition" correspond to the French *version* and *thème*—relics of the past, come down from the old Latin instruction. The sooner we banish them and what they stand for, the better. We are trying to teach people to read, write, and speak French, and not to translate, compose, and pronounce it.

What I am saying here is in line with the work of the reformers in Europe, who speak of their method as the "New," "Reform," "Direct," or "Phonetic." The first year in the high school should be chiefly imitative, with much oral instruction; the grammar should be inductive; the whole effort should be bent toward giving an intuitive feeling for the language. Reading should be introduced early, and should go on with speaking and writing. The great difficulty with us is the lack of suitable texts, because existing texts have been edited to be worked out with grammar and dictionary after the manner of the Latin classics, and the attempt is made to bring the text within the comprehension of beginners by abundant notes. This is futile. A student must work up to a French classic just as he would work up to a symphony of Beethoven—by graded exercises. What we need, therefore, is an abundance of easy texts—stories written for the purpose or simplified from existing tales. The student should have a text whose structural difficulties are not beyond him; and this can be made the basis for all the exercises of the class.

Writing can be begun almost as soon as reading. As we are trying to create an instinctive feeling for the language, it should be based on the text, first by answering questions then by summaries, then by explanations. When the student can express an opinion about the text, he is beginning his emancipation from the model. These summaries are invaluable, as the student passes gradually from them to original expression. There is no harm in having him make a summary of everything he reads, either orally or in writing.

Speaking should be carried on constantly from the first. The vocabulary should be small, and should consist of the names of familiar objects and ideas. If a learner can speak about the ordinary things of life, it is an easy matter for him to apply this power to other subjects.

A rapid translation into English takes place at first with every learner of a language; when he sees a pen the word "pen" will come to his mind first, and afterwards *plume*. To speak French he must momentarily drop the English association, and to help him toward this, we must make as much of a French atmosphere as possible in the class-room. At any rate, it is wise to act as if the double association did not take place, and to make the work so rapid and clear that he can think only French. Right here is the core of French instruction. We are not attempting to destroy the English associations, but to build up French ones also, so that the student shall become bilingual. This is why there is so much talk about "creating a French atmosphere," by using French in class, by means of charts, pictures, maps, and books. A teacher may ask a student to give the English for a French word or phrase, but evidently only with the idea of giving him the proper associations to connect with the French expression. The English must be dropped at once.

Here in California we have passed through the grammar stage, and the natural-method stage. At the present time we are struggling with the translation evil.

Of course, French cannot be taught in two years, but very much of value can be taught in that time and correct foundations

can be laid. The shortness of the time at least is no excuse for a false method. We must show that the modern languages have objects and methods of their own; that they encroach on no other field; that they have as much educational value as Latin; that they are supplementary to it, and not antagonistic. We must show that four good years of French are equal to four good years of Latin. If we get these, we shall not simply "translate" a few classics, but shall teach our students to read the unsurpassed French literature, and at the same time lay foundations for business or travel.

The report of the Committee of Twelve has done much toward systematizing French instruction in this country. It is now time to complete its work. There should be a revision of its discussion of methods with full references to the literature of the modern reforms. The suggested courses for the four years should be gone over, and especially should there be a list of texts, worked out with great care and graded as exactly as is possible.

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